

# DEMOCRATIZATION OF ISLAMIC MOVEMENTS: WHY BALLOT NOT BULLET?

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## ABSTRACT

The relationship between Islam and democracy can be viewed based on the participation of Islamic movement in the democratic process through election. This democratization of Islamic movement became more significant in early 1990s when authoritarian governments accepted democracy and introduced the multi-party system. The Islamic movement and Muslims have accepted democracy as the channel to obtain legal political means because some of the principles of democracy such as justice, freedom and equality are embodied in (syura) in Islamic politics. For further discussion on the democratization of Islamic movement, this paper explores several factors that influence Islamic movement to participate in the democratic process through election.

## INTRODUCTION

In the 1990s, two significant phenomena happened and filled up the vacuum in the Muslim world. According to Esposito (1995), the two phenomena were the Islamic resurgence and democratization. Since the end of Cold War that lead to the collapse of communism and the break-up of Soviet Union, Islamic resurgence is seen as the '*wahid*' number to the West. According to Mir Zohair Hussain (1996), Islamic resurgence is supported by fundamentalists, revolutionists or reformists. Such resurgence brings big impact to international relations. This also reflects Islamic resurgence as a threat to the West.

The waves of Islamic resurgence gets bigger when Islamic movements show their interest to accept the democratic process through election as their political '*wadah*.' This is due to their ambition to fight for greater participation in the political process. Interestingly, the acceptance of Muslim political movement towards democratic process through

election reflects their will to change the pattern and paradigm of the struggle from radical to moderate.

According to Esposito, the 1980s showed the stressful and violent movement of Islamic political movement:

Many in the Muslim world and the West charged during the 1980s that Islamic organizations were simply radical fringe groups that were not representative and would simple be repudiated by the electorate. The justification for the condemnation and suppression of Islamic movements had been that they were violent extremist, small nonrepresentative groups on the margins of society and regional stability (1995, 197).

Such radicalization can be perceived more often after the Iranian Revolution 1979. The revolutionary waves influenced the approach of Islamic political movements in their political agenda. They rejected democracy and representative system since they used forces and violence. Three significant violent incidents were the overtake of Kaa'bah in Mecca in November 1979, the assassination of Eqtyptian President, Anwar Sadat, in October 1981 and the clash of Islamic militants and Syrian regime in Hama in 1982 (Ismail, 1997).

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However, the situation changed in the 1990s when the Islamic political movements changed their political strategy and approach from radical to tolerance. They began to accept the democratic process through election and emerged as an effective opposition. In 1990s, they began to adopt Islamic concepts in their political movements. The adoption of Islamic concepts such as *al-ta'ddudiyah* (multiplicity), *mutama' al-madani* (civil society), *huquq al-insan* (the human rights), *hurriyah* (freedom) and *shafafiyya* (transparency) can be viewed as part of their attempts to move towards democratization. More importantly, the democratic process emphasizes on the development of good government, including the practice of the political system based on justice and respect towards basic rights (Mauther, 1992). This brings challenges to the present governments which mostly are enduring autocratic crisis.

On the other hand, the participation of Islamic movement in the democratic process through election is further assisted by the democratization movements around the world since 1970 and 1980 which have succeeded over the beliefs of authoritarianism (Huntington, 1997). At that time, the Muslim government and political leaders have developed an environment of 'open' political competition. They allow the existence of

multi-party system in their nation-state political system. Yet, such openness can be viewed as a threat and fear of the establishment party. This is because the establishments might lose their political means if the Islamic movement won the election. This is what had happened to the FLN in Algeria when the FIS won the election in 1999.

The participation of Islamic movement in the democratic process through election can be seen in large part of Islamic world. This shows a new phenomenon in politics. Their willingness for power-sharing and tolerance with the present government apart than accepting the risk of losing in an election have questioned the relevancy of Islam and democracy relationship. The success of Islamic political movement in democratic process proved that Islam can cooperate with democracy. Since then, the concepts of democratization in Islamic political movement and Islamism process have often been highlighted. In fact, these two phenomena were viewed as complementary of each other.

Despite the two factors discussed above, there are other factors that influence Islamic movement in accepting the democratic system along with participating in election and opposing the terrorist approach. Hence, this article further explains those factors of the participation of Islamic movements in the democratic process through election.

### **FACTORS THAT ENCOURAGE PARTICIPATION OF ISLAMIC MOVEMENTS IN DEMOCRATIC PROCESS THROUGH ELECTION**

According to Kurshid Ahmad (2000), democracy is the stepping stone to the Islamic emergence or Islamism process. The implementation of Islam can only be implemented through the democratic line. Kurshid elaborates, Islamic order (referred as Islamism) should be involved together with the needs or aspiration of its believers (referred as democracy). He further argues,

“Islamic imperatives and the people’s will, longing and aspirations go together. Democratization is bound to be stepping stone to Islamization. The fulfillment of Islamic aspirations would be possible only through the promotion of democratic processes” (Kurshid Ahmad, 2000, 12).

Although democracy was invented by the West, the Islamic political movements have no other choice but to accept it. The former Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, perceives that Muslims accept democracy without much comparing from Islamic perspective. He argues, “*for example, the pragmatic South-East Asian Muslims have adopted democratic practices, institutions and systems without much regard for their correspondence with Islamic ideology*” (Imtiyaz Yusof, 1999, 279). There are several factors that encourage the participation of Islamic political movement in the democratic process. These factors include both external and internal factors. Among the factors are:

## **The impact of the Western colonialism**

As we have known, most Islamic nation-states lost their powers when the West colonized them. This colonial process that took more than two centuries not only resulted in the Muslims losing their nation-states, but also their minds, culture and socio-economic values as a whole. Kurshid further elaborates on this perspective of the Westernization:

It was under colonial rule that a number of institutions were imposed upon Muslim lands through transplantation from the West as a part of its so-called 'civilizing mission' ("the White Man's Burden"), which in fact represented the worst part of imperialism. Law, judiciary, economy, education, administration, language, literature, arts, architecture, in short all elements of society and culture were subjected to enforce Westernization (2000, 16).

Colonization and Westernization are reasons why Muslims rose up to fight against colonialism. The interaction of Muslim world and the West especially in the context of colonialism increased the awareness among Muslims on expanding Islamic concepts rather than emphasizing on their orthodox way in political movements. This expansion of Islamic concepts is essential in gaining independence from the Western colonials. In Malaysia (Malaya then), for example, the Islamic emergence in their independence struggle was advocated by Hizbul Muslimin (HAMIM) which later was banned by the British in 1948.

The acceptance of Islamic political movement towards democracy becomes more important after the independence. This is because they have problems with the Westernized leadership among the locals who continued the Western legacy. Kurshid (2000) further elaborates, "*by and large, after independence, the reins of political power in most Muslim countries fell into the hands of this Westernized leadership groomed during the colonial period, with continued linkages with the culture and political designs of the West*" (17). This situation engenders the conflict to the Muslims because they want the leadership orientation to return to the Islamic grassroots comprehensively. Hence, the Islamic political movements become the channel to this aspired Islamic emergence that chooses the democratic process (also part of Western legacy) to change the present leadership. Only through democracy will these movements obtain the government that is recognized by the people.

### **Opposition's stand**

Most Islamic political movements are opposition parties in their respective countries. This means that they have yet to acquire the ruling mandate. Oppositional Islam that they incorporate do not result in any benefits to Muslims since they adopt the 'wait-and-see' approach or choose an approach that is non-democratic process such as coup d'état and overthrow. With their involvement in the democratic process, at least, they

have the opportunity to take over the ruling mandate legally if they win the election and provide Islamic political leadership for the people (Kurshid, 2000). Democracy can be seen as the hope to see the stand of Islamic ruling government.

Oppositional politics also reflects its function in providing the people space to be involved effectively. According to the young Indonesian thinker, Al-Chaidar (1999), oppositional politics is necessary, so that, differences in politics can be resolved together with the involvement of the people, the choosing society and governmental agencies. This provides good channel for the people to cast their vote and have freedom of expression without fear.

In summary, democracy indeed recognizes the opposition's stand. Oppositional politics is well-respected in democracy. Their roles are recognized similar to the ruling government. In fact, they have the opportunity to govern if the people choose them to rule. Only the people deserve to choose the oppositions to construct a new government.

### **Mechanism to reject dictators' rule**

Democracy can be seen as a political mechanism to avoid dictatorship. Dictatorship means governing without restriction, above the law and constitution (McLean, 1996). Dictatorship is often related with the elements of cruelty, exploitation and violence towards the people. In Islam, dictatorship is strongly forbidden and most hated. Allah's commandments in verses 97-98, Surah Hud in Al-Quran mean:

“To Fir'aun (Pharaoh) and his chiefs, but they followed the command of Fir'aun (Pharaoh) and the command of Fir'aun (Pharaoh) was no right guide. He will go ahead of his people on the Day of Resurrection, and will lead them into the Fire, and evil indeed is the place to which they are led”

The well-known scholar, Yusof Qardawi (1998), admits democracy can be a mechanism for the people to reject dictatorship. He believes,

“... democracy is not against the principle of governing which belongs to Allah, the fundamental of Islamic law. It is against the individual governing that is the basis of dictatorship. It is not necessary for the people who believe in democracy to reject 'hakimiyah' Allah to the people. This is not even intended by the people who call out for democracy. What they mean and want is to reject dictatorship or cruel kings who are mean and arrogant in administrating the people as named by hadith as *Raja Yang Memutuskan ataupun Raja yang Takbur dan Zalim*' (1998, 24).

The statement above also explains, with democracy, the people have the right to evaluate and penalize the government that practice oppression and cruelty. In the election process, for example, the people have the right to reject and penalize such leaders by not voting

for them. Based on this factor, Islamic movements decide to accept democracy since the Islamic leadership that they incorporate is highly transparent in governing and reject dictatorship.

### **Guarantee for human rights**

Apart from democracy becoming a deterrence factor to dictatorship, the democratic system also plays the role as the guarantee for human rights which emphasizes the high values of justice, freedom and equality. In democracy, issues like justice, freedom and equality are most important elements. In the democratic context, justice means treatment given to the people is not biased and prejudiced. Freedom comprises freedom of speech, expression, media, voting and religions. In addition, people should be guaranteed for equal rights in politics. They should be allowed to be involved in political activities without any restriction. Besides, the people should be encouraged to contribute towards the development of the government even though the means is very easy and low (K.Ramanathan, 2003). Without these elements, the formed government will not practice democratic governing; instead it may practice tyranny and dictatorship.

In Islam, the values of justice, political freedom and political equality should be implemented for the sake of the public. Justice, according to Islam, for example, is an important element to be given to all humans regardless their facial features, skin colour, gender, race and ethnic groups. Justice is immortal and universal – *ethica perennis et universalis* (Azizan, 1996, iii).

From this perspective, Islamic movements view that democracy can be ‘*wahana*’ (approach) to strive for Islamic political aspiration, which emphasizes on justice, freedom and political equality for the people since democracy also emphasizes on the very same elements. Therefore, Kurshid (2000) is accurate in his perspective that democracy is a stepping stone for the Islamic political aspiration and Islamism process as a whole.

### **Preventing ‘zero sum game’**

According to Mumtaz Ahmad and J. William Zartman (1997), democracy can prevent the situation of ‘zero sum game’ in political party competition. This means in political party competition according to democratic process, a party cannot lose or win all because democracy offers healthy competition and there shall be no monopoly. This is further elaborated by the following:

We do know that in federal democratic system, one can easily avoid a zero sum game in which the winner takes all. In such a system, one can multiply winners; federal, state and local. Electoral democracy is a multistage voting process. So party may lose at the national level but win at the state or local level. At national level, an Islamic party may

play the role of a loyal opposition. But at the state or local level, simultaneously, the Islamic party may become the government, and the party in power at the national level may become the loyal opposition of Islamic party at the state level (76).

Both multiply winners and multistage voting process are best described in the development of *Parti Islam Semalaysia* (PAS) in Malaysia. Although PAS lost at the parliamentary level and became the opposition, PAS won its assembly seats in Kelantan and eventually became the ruling government of Kelantan. The same thing occurred to UMNO. Although UMNO won the federal parliamentary election and formed the ruling federal government, UMNO is an opposition in Kelantan. Mumtaz Ahmad and J. William Zartman (1997) allege,

Those who have been following political developments in Malaysia over the past two or three decades will testify to the interlocking relationship that has emerged between ruling UMNO party at the national level and the Islamic party that has come to power in at least three states over the past two years. Recently, I visited the state of Kelantan, where the PAS has formed its government the second time around. The first time they won 99 percent of the state assembly seats. In fact, they had to make sure that at least there was one member in the state legislature who belonged to the opposition political party. Otherwise, there would be no fun. PAS has again come to power in Kelantan. The UMNO, which is a broad-based party that rules at the national level, acts as the loyal opposition at the state level. At the national level, UMNO is in power and the Islamic party (PAS) is acting as the loyal opposition (76).

The earlier statement proves that democracy create a good environment of healthy, balanced and fair political competition. This attracts the Islamic movements to accept democracy because through this way, they may win the election and acquire its means to form ruling government. Even when they lose the election, their losses are not total but also winnings since their involvement in election provides an alternative political choice for the public.

### ***Wahana da'wah berhikmah and effective***

Democracy allows the journey of Islamic 'da'wah', *tasammuh* (tolerance) and recognizes the freedom of religion and individuality. This is because 'democracy leaves the matter related with religion to the individuals themselves to decide without any interference and force' (Mohd Izani, 2000, page: 53). Democracy indeed respects the freedom of religion, apart from the freedom of individual and expression.

A famous scholar, Deliar Noer (1982), admits that Indonesian Islamic parties accept democracy because the political system recognizes individual freedom. Eventually, these parties choose the peaceful path to achieve their political means. He further elaborates,

However, the perspectives regarding this problem within the Islamic society itself shows different opinions ranging from forces-oriented view by one party to democratic view by other party. The last view acknowledges individual freedom and surrenders the matter related to religion to the individuals themselves, though the very same perspective affirms on the necessity of information and intensive persuasion. Generally, Indonesian Islamic parties choose the path and perspective that inclines towards prosperity and democracy (1982, 5).

According to Imtiyaz Yusuf (1999), democracy highly values freedom of religion and tolerance among religions. Since discussions and dialogs are highly highlighted in democracy, the respect and understanding of religions can be constructed (Imtiyaz, 287). He further argues, democracy is the best safeguard against any discrimination of religion and politics. Based on the above factor, the acceptance of Islamic political movement on democracy has the strong base in its effort to introduce Islam without using force and violence.

### **Eroding the image of radical, extreme, violent and cruelty**

The involvement of Islamic political movement in the democratic process through election can eradicate slander and negative thoughts of Islam such as radical, extreme, violent and brutal. This is because in democracy, Islamic movements have to undergo a democratic process that highly values individual freedom. For instance, in democracy, Islamic movements should gain their political means by participating in election, not by using force and violence through overthrowing government and wars.

The stress towards diplomacy and discussion makes Islamic movements not using violence to achieve their political means. The compromise culture and haggle in achieving mutual cooperation (in the context of power sharing) may prevent Islamic political movements from taking radical and extreme actions. On the same note, they might put aside their Islamic political aspiration (agenda) to find universal understanding. Mumtaz Ahmad and I. William Zartman (1997) mention,

Second, in democratic politics, they will have to make alliances with other political groups and actors and forego some of their pet ideas. When the Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia (ABIM), which was the harbinger of Islamic revival in that country, joined the secularly oriented ruling party, UMNO, it had to abandon several of its pet Islamic projects. During the 1980s, when the Islamic Tendency Movement in Tunisia joined the main trade-union party, UGTT, the Human-Rights

League, the Socialist Democratic party, and even formed an alliance with the Popular Unity party and the Communist, it had to forego several its Islamic demands (74).

In addition, another example in the context of Malaysia is the PAS decision to forego its slogan of Islamic state in the General Election 1999. This shows that in democracy, they can 'relax' their Islamic agenda despite the significance of the agenda and what they have struggled for. Instead, PAS is currently more inclined to the struggle for justice and democratic principles that have long been accepted in consensus. This attributes as a long-term strategy that will eventually benefit the party. The direction of this struggle in justifying justice and fight for democratic principles can be accepted in general with the components of oppositions, *Barisan Alternatif* (BA). This later inclines its direction towards the development of Islamic nation-state which highly values justice, freedom and equality.

The discussion above clearly shows that democracy actually helps the rise of Islam in 1990s that emphasizes towards the construction of an Islamic nation-state. The involvement of Islamic political movement in the democratic process through election around the world shows the tolerance and mutual cooperation in achieving political power apart from power sharing with the authorities. In Malaysia, Islamic movements as in Islamic political parties that fight for Islamic interests such as PAS are also involved in democratic process through elections in order to obtain the ruling mandate.

## CONCLUSION

The factors discussed above have explicitly shown that Islamic movement which shapes Islamic parties have strong reasons to accept democracy as their channel to achieve political means in a peaceful way. Such approach also shows their way of opposing the radical approach which uses violence. Today, the participation of Islamic parties in the democratic process through elections can be viewed as a vital phenomenon in political competition that may challenges the position of establishment party. The success of Islamic party in democracy can be considered as an achievement as in making the good relationship between Islam and democracy. Vice-versa...

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